IN COMEDY IT WAS QUITE THE SAME IN THE OLDEN DAYS

To Be Sure "Gammer Gurton's Needle" Was Written Before Shakespeare Was Born, but It Is Quite at Home on Broadway

Clearing Up a Misunderstanding and Discovering Some Most Remarkable Likenesses Between Sixteenth Century Play, Players and Playwrights and Those of To-day

By FRANK WARD O'MALLEY.

DIAMOND JIM BRADY, James Brander Matthews, Mike Selwyn, William Travers Jerome, Winthrop Ames, Manny Chapelle—these and others among Broadway's first night devotees of the history, philosophy and ethics of the drama had better make a New Year's resolution to brush up in their studies, particularly in the matter of the history of the early English stage.

The absence of Jim Brady, Jim Matthews, Mike Selwyn, Bill Jerome and Winny and Manny from the slightly baldheaded row of the Princess Theatre recently when the Stuart Walker Portmanteau Theatre players first presented "Gammer Gurton's Needle" at the Princess was more than noticeable. It was deplorable, and it was all due to a lack of knowledge on their part of the elements of the history of the drama in England.

They stayed away from the first night of "Gammer Gurton's Needle" simply because they had fallen, hook, line and sinker, for an advance story about the piece which had been shot the length of Broadway by some one who undoubtedly was a jealous rival of Max Elser and Russell Janney, who are presenting the play at the Princess these days and nights.

According to the Broadway know it all who started the yarn which scared both the Jims and Mike and Winny and Manny and the rest away from the first night performance the plot of "Gammer Gurton's Needle" had to do with the sorrows which came to *Gammer Gurton* when, early in the play, she lost her hypodermic needle. The old girl was a dope, so the ill informed of Broadway heard and believed, and the loss of her only hypo needle meant that she had to struggle through the rest of the play with no way of shooting the coke into her arm just above her cuff clock.

"Too smeary with pathos for mine," Prof. Jim Matthews is reported to have said in effect to the rest of the boys around the Amen Corner of the Friars Club just before dinner on the night of the opening. "Me for a good picture show or something to-night."

"You said a pageful there—turn over, Jim," cried Mike Selwyn, who like Jim Matthews lives and breathes the drama. "The way I feel this evening, prof, means I must meet a couple of laughs to cheer me. How about a little stewed tripe and a hunk of pie right here in the grill and then setting sail in a couple of seagoing hacks for the Rialto Theatre? Even if the bill is rotten Sam Rothapfel is always a scream to me."

"Atta boy, Mike! You've sure said something," yawned Prof. Matthews with an attempt at enthusiasm. "But I feel so all in myself that Sam's gotta go better than per usual to pull a laugh out of yours as ever, Jim Matthews. What ho, waiter! Bring me and Mike and the other gents here some groups of stewed tripe and smothered onions. Come, my good man, hasten."

And thus it was that Mike and Jim and Manny Chapelle and Winny Ames and the rest missed "Gammer Gurton's Needle"—all because they fell for the vicious story that the piece was another of those gloomy dope fiend plays.

Old *Gammer Gurton* probably never did ply the coke needle. There's no more authority for saying she didn't than for saying she did; nevertheless one may feel morally certain that she never even so much as heard of that kind of needle. All one has to know—and the freshest freshman who attends Prof. Jim Matthews's lectures at Columbia should know it—is that "Gammer Gurton's Needle" was about the first English folk comedy produced by the Jake Shubert of his day, said comedy having been written at least four years before Shakespeare was born, or some time around 1560. So how could she know anything about hypo needles?

McKAY MORRIS, as HODGE; NANCY WINSTON as TYB, ROBERT COOK as COCKE and JUDITH LOWRY as GAMMER GURTON. Photos by White.

She was a modern, astonishingly so, in many ways. In fact it was the surprising modernity of some of the lines and situations of a comedy written before Shakespeare was born that prompted me while watching the play in the Princess a few afternoons ago to turn out this more or less technical paper on that phase of the piece. But coke needles—one laughs!

Gammer Gurton does lose a needle every afternoon and evening these days on the stage of the Princess, but not one of the hypo kind. The programme doesn't go into a detailed description of the needle she loses and neither do the lines of the play describe it in so many words.

One learns early, however, that it was the only needle in the house. "Even so," one asks oneself, "why all the fuss over the loss of a needle?" For if ever an aged dame put up a holler over the loss of something it was *Gammer* when she learned of her loss. From the way she cussed and bit and scratched and railed a hullabaloo generally one might have thought that she was long on war bride stocks and that Secretary Lansing had just made another unauthorized speech to the newspaper boys.

And then in a flash all was clear—after a lot of unnecessary surmising on the part of the audience which the playwright might have made plain from the very first in a single line. What grandma had lost was the needle to her dance music victrola.

The idea was laughable, but at the same time charmingly modern. And there was in the situation, too, just that note of tender pathos which all good comedy should have. Only fancy how our most utterly ultra grandmas of to-day would kick and bite and holler if they, like *Gammer Gurton*, lost the only needle in the house; and likely as not a bunch of the modern grandpa and grandma's cronies of the slightly older dancing set dropping in at any moment assured that grandma will get out a few good snappy tango discs and adjust the needle while grandpa rattles up a few powders in the cocktail shaker to cheer up the boys and girls during the impromptu dancing party.

Gammer Gurton could not slang things and act up generally with the versatility, perhaps, of the modern members of what corresponds to *Gammer's* older dancing set. Max Elser and Russ Janney found it necessary, in fact, to tone down only a few of the cuss words in the original of the ancient comedy. But suppose the actual language that a dancing grandma of to-day lets loose when she loses the only needle in the household were to be taken down stenographically, and then suppose a playwright—the Thomas boys, Gus and Al, say, or Gene Walter or Gus McHugh—were to try to reproduce the language on the stage only slightly toned down: Oh, boy!

Supposing the costuming of "Gammer Gurton's Needle" is historically correct (and it must be, because Old Max Elser and Young Russell Janney only recently were completely educated at dear old Cornell and therefore couldn't possibly be misinformed about anything), then *Gammer* was somewhat more prudish in the matter of dress than her sisters of the same age are to-day. All the other girls in the sixteenth century show wear, as do so many of the grandmas of to-day, skirts just long enough to keep their knees warm, but *Gammer* is dressed right down to the soles.

Perhaps there's a reason for this which *Gammer* wishes to conceal from the Princess Theatre audiences. Maybe she has two reasons.

Be that as it may, the ancient comedy hasn't proceeded many minutes before one is astonished to learn how much the stage comedy of the sixteenth century is like the Broadway comedy of to-day—or how much the present day Broadway comedy resembles the old stuff, put it any way you choose.

The curtain rises, for instance, to disclose a scene that represents the Main street of an English town of the long ago, yet it might be Manhattan's Broadway. To take but one item that makes for the resemblance to the Manhattan of to-day, there isn't a single mail box the whole length of the street. Also the first girl who comes into view is a blonde. And she speaks the Broadway tongue:

"If *Gammeh* heah not some comfoht,
she sayeth she is but dead——
Shall neveh come within huh lips one
inch of meat noh bread!"

Furthermore, to pursue the points of resemblance between the old days and these most of the long speeches in "Gammer Gurton's Needle" are delivered by the female characters. Woman speaks the first word in the play, and would have the last word also if it were not that the playwright chases all the girls off the stage just before the final curtain, leaving the street to mere man. Whereupon once the girls have left the man begins to talk roughly about their past performances, which is Broadway to the life.

And at the very last moment one actor is left on the street, and he stands around talking about himself. After that touch anybody who knows his Broadway expects any minute to see a Forty-second street crosstown car glide out of the wings and cross Main street, England.

The further fact that a large part of the Main street of Merrie Old England depicted in "Gammer Gurton's Needle" is occupied by a gin mill also helps along the feel of modernity. Then, too, one is soon made to realize that much of the plot and stage business is concerned with a chicken. Why does a chicken cross the street? they asked then as now. In "Gammer Gurton's Needle" the chicken is supposed to have crossed the street to enter the gilded gin mill. Recently on the stage of the New Amsterdam Theatre the question, "Why does a chicken cross the street?" was asked, and the answer was, "To get into Flo Ziegfeld's office." In other words, what is was.

"I am not glad to see her in this dump," says the *Hodge* of "Gammer Gurton's Needle," looking regretfully the while toward the inviting door of *Dame Chat's* place of business into which the chicken is supposed to have disappeared. Now there's a line that might have been clipped bodily from any copy of the ante-midnight ten cent edition of the *Morning Telegraph*.

Finally in the matter of rhymes "Gammer Gurton's Needle" might have been written by none other than Irving Berlin himself. To be fair to Poet Berlin it should be said that when he wrote "Watch Your Step," to take but one of the Broadway poet's masterpieces as an example, he did go to the trouble of getting a good rhyme for the word "Alda." He rhymed "Alda" with "sweeter," "honey" with "Fanny" and "roundelay" with "Mike Donlin," thus preserving as much rhyme as the poet and Broadway considered necessary for practical purposes.

GREGORY KELLY as DR. RAT, THE CURATE and FLORENCE WOLLERSEN, as DAME CHAT, in "GAMMER GURTON'S NEEDLE" at STUART WALKER'S PORTMANTEAU THEATRE.

But the ancient and unknown author of "Gammer Gurton's Needle" was the father and mother of all the musical comedy rhymsters of Main street, Manhattan. Quite in the manner of his followers of to-day he rhymed "needle" with "weal," "broke" with "fortnight," "fashion" with "constellation," "security" with "plaudity," "disorder" with "murder" and "plate" with "neat," although it's just possible that back in 1560 the merry villagers did pronounce neat as if it were nate.

Which further suggests modern Broadway. Most of the waiters in Tom Healy's and Shanley's pronounce it "nate." Also—but the similarities between the stage of the old days and to-day crop up so often in "Gammer Gurton's Needle" that the cost of white paper makes it impossible to list them all here. Wherefore the only way to get them all is, as Max Elser and Russ Janney will agree, to go to the Princess Theatre (matinee and night performances every day this week, telephone Bryant something or other, so Max and Russ, who have been hanging around my typewriter while this effort is in the making, have just whispered) and see "Gammer Gurton's Needle" for yourself.

You'll find it some place on a bill that also includes "The Birthday of the Infanta" and "King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior." The authorship of "Gammer Gurton's Needle" may be in dispute, but the name of the author of "King Argimenes," &c., &c., &c., never will be forgotten. Max and Russ merely say now on their Princess Theatre programmes that Lord Dunsany is the author of the "King Argimenes," &c., &c., &c., &c., piece, but as soon as they are able to get a theatre with a wider frontage they're going to spell his lordship's name all along the block in electric lights, thus: "Playing Now! 'King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior,' by John Edgar Moreton William Drax Plunkett, Eighteenth Baron Dunsany." The electric light bills will raise the deuce with the profits, but what care Max Elser and Russ Janney? You can't discourage these young collegers.

Stories of the Town

THE most honored man in one of the old fashioned combination theatres, as they used to be called in this city, sat in an extra orchestra chair which was kept for him alone. In the Grand Opera House, when it played all the successes which had been seen at other and more expensive theatres, many of the audience attended each Saturday matinee just as regularly as the subscribers to the seats at the Metropolitan Opera House are to be seen in their places. In those days it was customary to reserve the same seats for these matinee goers every Saturday.

Of all these matinee goers the proudest was the fat man who had the comfortable sensation of occupying a place twice as large as that of any one else in the audience. This seat was made by removing two orchestra stalls on the aisle for this performance and putting in their place the large armchair. This luxurious manner of enjoying the matinee continued so long as the regular patron lived.

Just now there is a well known first nighter who enjoys a like privilege at some of the city theatres. He is never compelled to struggle with the crowd for his coat when the performance is over. Just as the curtain is falling—experience has enabled them to gauge the matter very accurately—two ushers rush down the aisle bearing his overcoat and walking stick. As the rest of the audience are starting out in search of their wraps the two ushers calmly help the fortunate spectator on with his coat. However enviously others may glance at him this same courtesy is extended to no other first nighter.

A handsome woman no longer in the first flush of youth sat in an uptown restaurant the other day. With her at lunch was her husband, by name Count Minotto. The woman was none other than Agnes Sorma, the famous actress who some years ago made a greater success at the Irving Place Theatre than any other German actress who had ever played there.

She was then at the zenith of her popularity and fame in Berlin, and there she played for a long time after her return. Her last notable success was in Max Reinhardt's revival of "Ghosts" at the Kammerspiele in Berlin. Soon afterward she retired from the stage and spent her time at her home in Berlin and in travel.

Her son is married to the daughter of a Chicago family. The Countess Minotto preserves much of her former appearance and manner. She acted here on her first visit with Director Christians of the Irving Place Theatre, and he was anxious to have her appear there for a few performances. But the actress has left the stage forever and will not be tempted to return.

Every strike, in whatever way it may be settled, is sure to leave its mark on the comfort of the public. The present winter has produced two which have had their effect on every New Yorker.

"What the milk strike did for every man," said a dweller in an uptown hotel, "you can appreciate the first thing in the morning. Is there a single hotel in this city which has not reduced the supply of milk and cream which it used to serve with breakfast? I don't care what the cost of the food may be or where one may get it.

"There has been as much of a difference everywhere as there was in the quick lunch rooms which cut the size of their glasses in two the day after the price of milk was raised. Of course, the amount which used to be served will never be restored whatever may happen.

"Then travel on the Broadway cars since the strike. Last night it took thirty-five minutes to go from Fifty-sixth street to Forty-second. This incredible length of time was due to the ignorance of the new men who tried to shunt the cars at Fiftieth street. None of them could do it properly and most of the delay came there.

"Every New Yorker has come to learn that each strike has its permanent consequences."

A concern of this city which distributes its shops and its sweets over all of Manhattan Island and a considerable part of the outlying districts has in recent months given its patrons something to think about. In some of its numerous branches there were the usual young women to wait on the crowding and thirsty customers. At others there were young men.

So soon as it seemed clear that the girls had been supplanted by the young men the next shop of the same company exhibited a row of smiling young women. The mystery of the changes seemed beyond solution. One brave soul was not too shy to ask whether or not the women had been or were on the point of being supplanted by the young men.

It was then that the mystery as to why some of the shops in this chain had girls behind the counters and the others had men was explained. Some of the shops close at 6 o'clock. Others are kept open until midnight. It is in the latter that men are employed in order that they may be able to deal with the crowds that come in the evening.

Tiny reindeer trotting forever the snow, fat Santa Clauses climbing over the roof, lights glowing invitingly from farmhouse windows—all these and similar means of decorating the private Christmas cards, which were more numerous this year than ever before, were eclipsed by the style which threatens to dominate this field altogether next season.

Nothing is so much in the mode as the coat of arms printed above the announcement of the Christmas greeting. Of course it is preferable to use one's own crest, but this matter may be readily adjusted, as there is not a name for which the stationer is not able to find a corresponding example of heraldry. It is only important to remember until next season the important fact that the crest is the mode for a Christmas card.

IROQUOIS INDIAN LIFE PORTRAYED IN NEW STATE MUSEUM RECENTLY OPENED

ONE of the features of the New York State Museum, which was formally opened in the Capitol at Albany last Friday, is a series of Indian groups illustrating the life of the Indians who once camped in the northern part of New York.

The museum, as it now stands, is in its scope the result of an enterprise forwarded by John H. Finley, president of the University of the State of New York. The general plan of the museum halls has been carried out during the past year by the execution of the contract for remodelling the west mezzanine and the construction of the alcoves for the Iroquois groups. Here is where the disastrous Capitol fire of 1911 did its greatest damage to the museum. The Iroquois exhibit is a memorial to a former Governor of the State, Myron H. Clark.

At the entrance to the Iroquois groups "The Sun Worshippers" are displayed. A warrior stands on tiptoe at the edge of the water, his face uplifted to the sun, his arms outstretched, his whole frame tense as if trying to lift itself in earnest supplication. Before him is a fire of wood chips from which rises a single coil of smoke. Behind him stand his squaw and his youthful son, bow in hand. The work of providing the large background scenery of this group—each background is fifty-five feet long and sixteen feet high—of placing the figures and of setting the accessories was done by David C. Lithgow. The planning of the groups has been the work of the State archæologist, Mr. Parker, whose intimate knowledge of the New York Indians is an assurance of the ethnological accuracy of the representations. The human figures, which are with few exceptions life casts, were made partly by Caspar Meyer and partly by Henri Marchand. The latter artist is also responsible for the modelled figures with portrait busts in the Mohawk group.

Another scene is the camp of the Seneca hunters. This is the first group in the habitat series and represents a Seneca family encamped on a hillside overlooking Canandaigua Lake in which is reflected Bare Hill in the distance. In the centre squaws are toiling arduously, on the left is a shack and skins are drying in the sun. In the background near the bank of the lake an Indian stands shooting an arrow.

The return of the warriors is depicted in another group. In the background is the Mohawk Valley at Sprakers. The Indians here are in the war costumes of the Mohawk Nation.

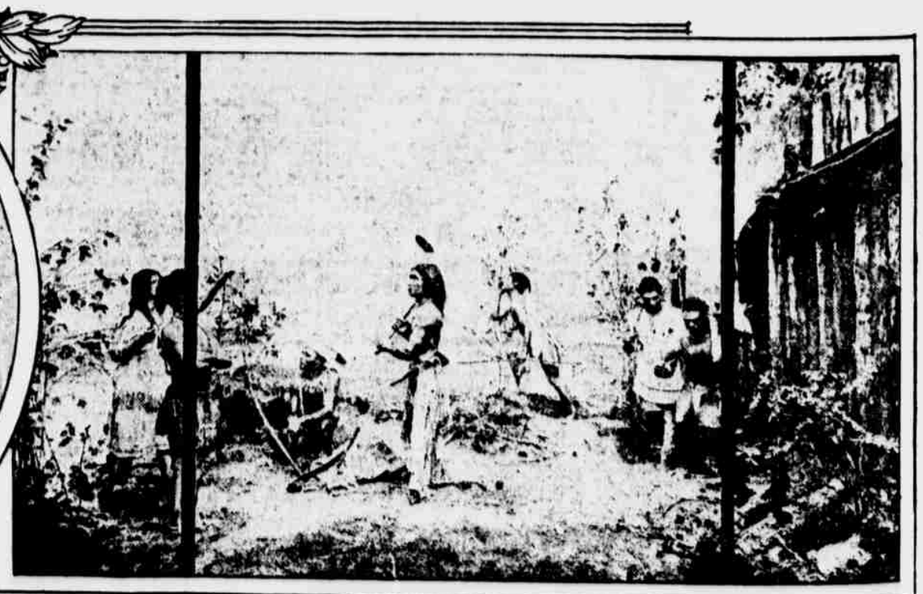
By virtue of the united action of the Iroquois League in council assembled at the State Capitol, June 29, 1898, the University of the State of New York became the official custodian of the historic wampums of the Five and Six Nations. Since the receipt of these records they have been kept in a safety deposit vault until proper provision could be made for their exhibition. They are now displayed in a strong case in the west mezzanine with labels explanatory of their significance. There are nineteen of these belts, among them some of the largest size and most elaborate workmanship and of fundamental significance to the Iroquois Confederacy.

An extensive array of cultural relics of the New York Indian is now nearly complete, the hall containing seventy-seven cases. Some important acquisitions have been made during the year.

The Charles H. Peck testimonial exhibit of edible and poisonous fungi is also part of the museum display. Prof. Charles H. Peck was the first State Botanist of New York.

SENECA HUNTER GROUP. SCENE AT CANANDAIGUA LAKE.

THE SUN-WORSHIPPERS: LUNETTE AT EASTERN ENTRANCE By D. C. Lithgow.



RETURN OF THE MOHAWK WARRIORS, SCENE NEAR SPRAKERS, N. Y.